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ABSTRACT

A multitude of factors affect the attitudes and behaviors that students bring to the learning situation. This document discusses some motivation-related terms and concepts. It then examines several factors that affect students' basic beliefs about and attitudes toward learning. The first section differentiates between the following terms: ability focus and task focus, performance goals and mastery goals, and learning and performance. The concept of "motivation to learn" implies that no external reasons exist for the pursuit of academic activities. Variables that contribute to the development of motivation to learn include parent role, developmental changes, self-perceptions of ability and competence, self-worth and effort, causal attributions, meaning, autonomy, and relatedness and belonging. (LMI)

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# To Learn or Not To Learn

## Understanding Student Motivation

**Linda S. Lumsden**

**There are three things to remember about education. The first one is motivation. The second one is motivation. The third one is motivation.** —former U.S. Secretary of Education Terrell H. Bell

Human beings are born with a hunger to learn, a seemingly insatiable appetite for knowledge. Infants and young children appear to be propelled by curiosity, driven by an innate need to explore, interact with, and make sense of their environment. As one author notes, "Rarely does one hear parents complain that their preschooler is 'unmotivated' " (James Raffini 1993).

Unfortunately, however, as children progress through our educational system, learning—at least learning that occurs in school settings—often becomes associated with drudgery rather than delight. It is disconcerting to watch toddlers who immerse themselves in exploring almost anything and everything around them become, in a few years, "turned off" by the educational system. Somewhere along the line many young people seem to lose their love of learning.

Figures on dropout rates can be viewed as one window into the problem of student disaffection with school. Tragically, each year 500,000 students in the U.S. leave school without diplomas or life skills (Hillery Motsinger 1993). But the apparent absence of motivation to learn is not confined to students

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who leave school prematurely. Many who remain in school also exude apathy. These students seem content with "sliding by," doing the minimum possible to get advanced to the next grade level. They show little interest in, and devote little time or energy to, school-related tasks. As a result, their achievement falls well below their ability. As Raffini notes, "More than one in four students who enter first grade leave before graduating, and many of those who do continue avoid making a personal commitment to the learning process."

Raymond Wlodkowski and Judith Jaynes (1990) are among those who note the correlation between motivation and underachievement:

> Since 1980 more than a dozen reports from national panels and commissions that have studied public education in this country agree that the school achievement of our children is below their abilities. In all of these instances, one of the main reasons cited is that many of our children lack motivation to learn in school.

The fallout from these trends is far-reaching. There are long-term personal and professional repercussions for individuals who do not successfully negotiate their way through our educational system. In addition, our country as a whole pays an economic and social price for students' languishing motivation to learn.

### A Sea of Complexity

Humans are complex creatures. Even seemingly simple, straightforward behaviors may spring from a myriad of motivational undercurrents. When we start to explore *why* individuals behave in particular ways and *what* can be done to try to establish adaptive patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving, or alter maladaptive patterns, we find ourselves in challenging territory.

It may be useful, therefore, to acknowledge at the outset that student motivation to learn is a convoluted, multifaceted subject. No one has found a secret elixer capable of instantaneously transforming disenchanted, apathetic students who seem to have lost their appetite for learning into students who suddenly crave the "food for their heads" that is dished up in their classrooms.

Fortunately, however, significant strides have been made in recent years regarding the nature of student motivation and how adaptive learning patterns can be established, preserved, and rekindled. This article discusses some motivation-related terms and concepts that surface frequently in the literature and then examines several factors that affect students' basic beliefs about and attitudes toward learning.

### Ways of Conceptualizing Student Motivation

At the crux of student motivation is the question *why*—why students engage, or in some cases choose not to engage, in school-related academic endeavors. Just because two students elect to pursue the same task, we should not assume their reasons for doing so are identical.

The underlying reasons that prompt student involvement in academic activities "have important consequences for how

[students] approach and engage in learning" (Carole Ames 1990). When a good grade is the paramount goal, for example, the thought processes and behaviors that are generated are likely to be different than when an interest in learning something new about a subject is the overriding impetus for participationn (Ames 1990).

Student motivation has been conceptualized in different ways. Although each conceptual model employs different terms, many models of motivation share much in common. Most, for example, create and contrast two theoretical types of learners or learning styles. Although students in the real world do not fit neatly into these discrete categories, the models are useful because they help us to grasp the concepts in their pure form.

**Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Orientation**

A growing body of evidence suggests that the way students approach tasks, the cognitive and affective processes they employ, and the level of learning that they ultimately derive from undertaking tasks depend to a great extent on whether they are operating from an extrinsic or an intrinsic motivational orientation.

According to Mark Lepper (1988), intrinsically motivated behavior encompasses that which is "undertaken for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes." In contrast, extrinsically motivated behavior consists of "actions undertaken *in order to* obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself" (Lepper).

Those with an extrinsic orientation toward learning perform school-related tasks primarily because they view them as a means of obtaining some form of reward not integral to the tasks themselves (in other words, good grades, teacher or parent approval, stickers, a place on the school honor roll). Students who have an intrinsic motivational orientation engage in learning essentially because they find meaning in the activities themselves.

One's motivational orientation can affect both the time spent on a task and the quality of involvement in the task (Lepper). Motivational orientation can also have a bearing on the level of task difficulty students select (Lepper). Students with an intrinsic orientation tend to prefer tasks that are moderately challenging, while extrinsically oriented students gravitate toward tasks that have a low degree of difficulty; they are most concerned with doing only what is necessary to obtain some form of reward external to the task itself. Extrinsically oriented students are also less likely than intrinsically oriented students to take academic risks as they respond to a given task (Lepper).

Generally, individuals with an extrinsic orientation toward learning expend less mental effort and employ less deliberate and less effective strategies when undertaking an activity than do intrinsically oriented individuals. Nolen, for example, found that when students engaged in expository reading with the primary goal of learning for its own sake (intrinsic motivation), they tended to value and use study strategies

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that demanded more effort and that enabled them to process information more deeply than did students who were primarily driven by the desire to demonstrate that they had superior ability at the task relative to other students (a form of extrinsic motivation) (Lepper).

**Ability Focus and Task Focus**

Another pair of terms appears frequently in the literature on student motivation—*ability focus* and *task focus*. Students with an ability orientation toward learning have a strong need to be judged able to perform tasks. These students closely monitor how their performance compares to that of their peers. Instead of focusing on their own progress and improving their own performance, they strive to outperform their peers. Since they have an especially strong need to be perceived as able and competent (hence the term *ability focus*), when given the choice, they are apt to avoid academically challenging tasks.

Moderately difficult tasks are unattractive to these students, while nonchallenging tasks are appealing because of the element of assured success. Although they learn little or nothing new by successfully performing tasks they have already mastered, these students are attracted to such tasks because they are assured of excelling at them. To succeed is more important than to learn through the process of grappling with challenging tasks.

In contrast, students with a *task orientation* undertake learning tasks primarily "to gain understanding, insight, or skill and to accomplish something that is challenging" (Maehr and Midgley). For this group, achieving mastery through effort is more important than trying to surpass the performance of others. Task-oriented students believe learning for its own sake has merit. They are more likely than ability-oriented students to take on academic risks, to attempt moderately challenging tasks to increase their understanding of a subject or to satisfy their curiosity. Even though they may have to struggle to fully grasp an idea or find a solution to a complex problem, they do not shy away from such challenges out of fear of failing because they view failure differently than ability-oriented students. These students are less threatened by the prospect of failure because they believe that if they exert sufficient effort, they will ultimately achieve success.

### Performance Goals versus Mastery Goals

*Performance goals* and *mastery goals* represent "different conceptions of success and different reasons for approaching and engaging in achievement activity" (Ames 1992). When performance goals take precedence, students focus less on the learning activity itself than on how their performance will reflect on their perceived ability and sense of self-worth. Students who are performance-oriented believe ability, not effort, is the primary determinant of academic outcomes. Those in this category have an especially strong need to be perceived as able; they also think of ability in terms of doing better than others, exceeding normative standards, and experiencing success with minimal effort (Carole Ames 1992).

When performance goals are preeminent, students seek public acknowledgment that they have performed at a higher level than others, that they have displayed superior ability. Those with this orientation view learning as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Their self-concept is also more intimately entwined with performance than it is in students with a mastery orientation. If performance-oriented students think failure—however they define it—is probable, they often prefer to withhold effort than to try hard and risk failure, because if they don't put forth effort, they believe the failure experience will not be interpreted as stemming from a lack of ability.

A student who is motivated by mastery goals, in contrast, focuses on "developing new skills, trying to understand their work, improving their level of competence, or achieving a sense of mastery based on self-referenced standards" (Ames 1992). Students who possess mastery goals believe that effort leads to success or mastery; they also spend more time on learning tasks and display higher levels of persistence in the face of failure than do performance-oriented students. In addition, students motivated by mastery goals tend to gravitate toward moderately challenging activities and willingly engage in academic risk-taking (C. Ames and J. Archer 1988).

### Motivation to Learn

The concept of *motivation to learn* is closely related to the concepts of *intrinsic orientation, task focus,* and *mastery goals*. All emphasize the value of learning for its own sake and the personal benefits or meaning the learner derives from the learning experience. None connote external reasons for pursuing academic activities.

Some authors use the terms *intrinsic motivation* and *motivation to learn* interchangeably, viewing them as essentially synonymous, while others argue that there are important differences. Jere Brophy is among those who consider the two terms distinct from one another. If a student tends to find meaning and value in school-related activities, and tries to get "the intended academic benefits" from those activities, Brophy (1986) would say the student possesses motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, "usually refers to the affective aspects of motivation—liking for or enjoyment of an activity," states Brophy. If this distinction is made, it is possible for motivation to learn to be

present even when pleasure in learning is absent. That is, although a student may not find an activity particularly enjoyable or interesting, it is still possible for him to strive to extract meaning from it.

## Motivation and Achievement

Although motivation is related to achievement, valid inferences about motivation cannot be made by examining achievement data (Ames 1990). Motivation to learn must be seen as a worthy outcome apart from its potential to enhance achievement (Ames 1990). If teachers and school leaders view motivation to learn as nothing more than a means to an end (increased achievement), they may not notice or even be particularly concerned that some practices that produce short-term gains in achievement also erode motivation. If achievement is stressed at all costs, teachers may fail to nurture in students the types of goals, beliefs, and attitudes that will enable them to engage fully in, and derive enjoyment and satisfaction from, learning (Ames 1990).

Similarly, Brophy points out the necessity of distinguishing *learning* from *performance*. While performance is overt in that it refers to the demonstration of skills or knowledge, the learning process is primarily covert; it consists of activities such as "information-processing, sense-making, and comprehension." When seeking to support or enhance motivation to learn, then, we should be concerned not only with strategies that have the capacity to enhance students' test-taking and assignment completion abilities, but with strategies that support and strengthen information-processing activities, such as paying attention, reading for understanding, paraphrasing, and so forth.

## Seeds That Spawn Student Motivation To Learn

Motivation to learn does not exist in a vacuum; many factors influence the initial constellation of attitudes children develop toward learning. Subsequent experiences that students have as they pass through the educational system either affirm or alter their evolving motivational patterns and associations with learning. Some variables that contribute to the formation or evolution of motivation to learn in children are examined below.

### The Role of Parents

As Raymond Wlodkowski and Judith Jaynes (1990) note, parents constitute "the first and most important teachers in a child's life." Particularly when they are young, children tend to perceive the world largely through the eyes of their parents, who act as models and interpreters.

Children's initial associations with learning are primarily an outgrowth of what they experience and observe in their home environment. With learning as with other areas, children pick up on the subtle and not-so-subtle attitudes and values that are held by their parents. When parents nurture their children's natural curiosity about the world by welcoming their questions, encouraging exploration, and familiarizing them with resources that can enlarge their world (such as the library), they are giving their children the message that learning is a worthwhile endeavor that can often be fun or satisfying as well.

If, on the other hand, parents are consistently unresponsive or react with irritation or impatience when their children inquire about things that intrigue them, over time their children will probably curb their attempts to learn more about the world. Their children's natural interest in learning will probably begin to wane, at least until someone crosses their path who skillfully "primes the pump" by creating a climate in which the child's dormant desire to learn once again bubbles to the surface.

In addition to whether parents are responsive to their children's cognitive needs and supply them with developmentally appropriate forms of cognitive stimulation, the degree to which parents provide their children with a basic sense of emotional security also influences their children's confidence in learning and motivation to learn. If children lack a solid sense of their own worth, competence, and self-efficacy—in short, if children do not learn to believe in themselves—their freedom to engage in academically challenging pursuits and capacity to tolerate and cope with failure will be greatly diminished. The attitudes and beliefs students have about themselves play a significant role in determining whether they develop constructive or ultimately self-defeating motivation patterns.

Parents' own attitudes toward school and education also come into play. If parents' school-related experiences were predomi-

nantly negative, they may find it hard to view their children's teachers as potential allies or partners. They are likely to distrust or feel intimidated by school personnel and shy away from direct involvement in their children's formal education.

Conversely, parents who had a positive educational experience during their childhood and who place a premium on formal education are more likely to have positive associations with schools and teachers. They are more apt to initiate a relationship with school personnel and assume, even demand, a high level of participation and involvement in their children's education. If these parents believe their children are being shortchanged in the classroom, they will probably act as fierce, persistent advocates for their children's educational needs.

**Developmental Changes**

As children mature, their beliefs about effort and ability and success and failure also change. Developmental changes that occur on cognitive, social, and emotional fronts as children age also alter their perceptions of themselves and their sense of what is necessary to preserve their sense of self-worth. What was relatively unimportant during one developmental stage may loom large in the next. Just as children's physical bodies undergo transformation as they develop, new levels of cognitive and emotional awareness also unfold within them. For example, Ames (1990) points out that

> Young children tend to have an optimistic view of their ability, high expectations for success, and a sort of resilience after failure. Moreover, young children tend to equate effort with ability. To them, hard workers are smart and smart children work hard. As children progress through school, their perceptions of their ability decrease and tend to reflect the teacher's evaluation of their ability. Older children's self-evaluations are more responsive to failure or negative feedback, meaning they are more likely to adjust their expectations downward after failing. Older children also develop a more differentiated view of effort and ability. While effort can increase the chance for success, ability sets the boundaries of what one's effort can achieve. Effort now becomes the 'double-edged sword.' Trying hard and failing threatens one's self-concept of ability.

If teachers are aware of how developmental changes may influence students' responses to learning situations, they will be more able to structure learning activities in an optimal fashion. They will also be better equipped to interpret and respond to and work at reversing maladaptive motivational patterns that have taken root in discouraged students.

As children develop, their perception of ability changes. "Studies find consistently that children's expectations for success at academic performance remain high, often unrealistically high, until about the second or third grade, and continue to decrease, on the average, throughout the elementary grades," states Deborah Stipek (1984). Young children don't make a clear distinction between effort and success. Generally, they equate learning with ability, and since all young children are able to learn, they tend to feel competent. Studies have found that despite repeated failure at a task, young children tend to maintain a sense of optimism about their ability to succeed at the task in future attempts.

When they begin school, children's sense of ability gradually undergoes transformation. They come to think of ability as "being more able than others" and also subscribe to the notion that "success is more impressive when few succeed" (John Nicholls 1984). Their "optimism and readiness to try despite failure gradually diminishes with age" as their concept of ability changes (Nicholls).

Although students of all ages are concerned with preserving their sense of self-worth in the midst of learning situations, the methods that older students may employ to "save face" often differ from those embraced by younger students. Because the strategies used by older students are often less straightforward, in many cases teachers may not recognize a student's attempt to maintain his sense of self-worth for what it is.

Some behaviors older students resort to when their self-concept of ability is threatened may appear to be propelled by a self-defeating motive. However, it is important for teachers to recognize that students engaging in such behaviors are trying desperately to minimize potential damage to their self-esteem and self-concept of ability. Although strategies such as "not trying, procrastination, false, effort, and even the denial of effort" in fact increase the likelihood of task

failure, many students who engage in such strategies are actually attempting to avoid some of the negative "fallout" of anticipated failure, contends Ames (1990). She explains that "what these behaviors accomplish is reducing the negative implications of failure" by divorcing failure from effort. If they feel destined to fail, older students may prefer to fail a task because of not putting forth sufficient effort than to exert considerable effort and still fail. From the student's perspective, if he fails without seriously investing himself in a task, he has achieved "failure with honor" because the failure experience cannot be attributed to lack of ability (Ames 1990).

### Self-Perceptions of Ability and Competence

As touched upon earlier, the way children view themselves has powerful implications for their motivation to learn. Whether they see themselves as "origins" or "pawns" (Richard deCharms 1976), as able or helpless, as high or low in ability and competence, influences how they cope with learning situations. Based on messages they receive from outside sources, such as their parents, teachers, and peers, children gradually come to think of themselves as generally capable or incapable, competent or incompetent. This general sense of one's ability, sometimes referred to as *self-concept of ability*, "has significant consequences for student achievement behavior" and for the way students respond to challenges and tasks that are set before them (Ames 1990).

Particularly after they enter the competitive world of school, students begin making judgments about their sense of competence. Internally, they size up learning situations and decide whether it is likely or unlikely that they will be able to succeed at a given task. Their self-perception of ability, as well as the nature of the task itself, influences their assessment. Those who consider themselves generally competent will be more likely to initiate and maintain involvement in activities, and, in doing so, will challenge and enhance their actual ability.

Although a child's self-concept of ability may be distorted and based on erroneous input, this does not nullify its influence. For example, one student who had an SAT score in the 98th percentile mistakenly thought this meant he had an IQ of 98. Because he thought his IQ was 98, he anticipated that college-level work would be difficult for him. Sure enough, he did indeed struggle during his first year at college. He was ready to drop out, convinced he could not do college calibre work. It was only later, after he received an accurate understanding of his SAT score and learned his IQ was really about 140, that his college performance began to soar. Soon he was doing A work. His newfound knowledge helped him to achieve his actual, rather than his perceived, potential (Raffini).

### Self-Worth and Effort

People need to experience themselves as valuable, as having significance and worth. We all struggle for both self-approval and the approval of others. Two terms frequently used to characterize how people think and feel about themselves are *self-concept* and *self-esteem*. Self-concept involves the collection of perceptions we possess about such things as our strengths, weaknesses, abilities, personality traits, and performance of roles, while our self-esteem is a product of how much relative importance we attach to each of these specific personal attributes and roles (Raffini). For example, if a person considers himself sloppy but being tidy is not a priority, his view of himself as sloppy (part of his self-concept) will not have a significant detrimental effect on his self-esteem. However, if he considers neatness an important virtue yet perceives himself as sloppy, then his self-esteem will be adversely affected.

Until children start school, they do not usually occupy formal roles outside their immediate family. Once they enter the public school system and identify with the role as student, however, children's overall sense of self-esteem or self-worth becomes closely linked to "their self-concept of ability in school settings" (Ames 1990). As Allan Ornstein (1994) states, "By the third or fourth grade, students have begun to judge their own abilities in relation to those of their classmates and to form attitudes about academic performance and schoolwork."

Early in their educational experience, children often discover that what seems to be attended to most closely by their teachers, parents, and even peers is how their performance and perceived ability stacks up against

that of other students, not how much effort they put forth or how much they improve their skills and abilities. Before long, they begin to internalize the message that "good students" are high achievers and "poor students" are low achievers.

Students use a variety of strategies to try preserve their sense of competency and self-worth in the classroom. Covington (1984) refers to the tendency to establish and maintain a positive self-image as the *self-worth motive*. Because academic ability is viewed as essential to the preservation of self-worth, students consider it critical to be perceived as intellectually capable and competent.

Unfortunately, in most schools the supply of rewards is insufficient to satisfy the demand for them. Although all students covet success and strive to be seen as able, schools only dole out a fixed number of rewards, usually in the form of grades. When teachers grade on the curve, for example, a handful of students find themselves at the top of the curve and are therefore considered successful while the majority fall in the average or below-average range.

Many schools and classrooms appear to have a king-of-the-hill mentality; they are strongly oriented toward competition rather than cooperation. This exacerbates the problem, for when significant emphasis is placed on relative ability and there are not enough rewards to go around, students are more likely to resort to defensive or maladaptive strategies in an attempt to avoid failure or minimize the negative meaning of failure. Although misguided, these tactics are seen by students as solutions to the challenge of keeping their self-image and sense of competence intact.

Superficially, many strategies students engage in to ward off failure or the psychological fallout of failure may seem to run counter to the goal of maintaining a positive self-image. However, on closer examination it is evident that in many cases behaviors such as procrastinating, cheating, avoiding tasks, and setting impossibly high goals for oneself are employed by students to protect their sense of self-worth.

Although ultimately ineffective, these strategies temporarily reduce some of the negative implications of failure. For example, when a student procrastinates and only ends up studying briefly right before an exam, others will not tend to question her ability if she subsequently fails the test; conversely, if she performs well on the test after investing minimal effort to prepare for it, she will probably be viewed by others as possessing considerable ability.

Another strategy used to avoid failure or minimize its effects is nonparticipation, which can manifest itself in a number of forms, from slouching down in one's chair in an attempt to avoid being called on, to appearing to be too busy taking notes for the teacher to interrupt, to chronic inattention, to—in its extreme form—dropping out. Cheating and setting impossibly high standards for oneself are other ultimately self-defeating strategies employed to preserve a sense of competence and self-worth.

In situations where students are required to participate but expect to fail, they often reduce the level of effort they put forth. When students fail, the shame they experience tends to be less if their level of effort was low than if their level of effort was high (Covington). This helps to explain why students may withhold effort in circumstances where it might be assumed they would exert extra effort in the quest to succeed.

Raffini asserts that students do not choose ignorance over competence when they have an equal choice. Many students reject school because they find the academic practices in their classrooms threatening to their sense of self-worth. They have learned that withdrawing from academic effort is less painful than experiencing the feelings of failure and hopelessness created by the systematic exclusion of forced academic competition.

Raffini views apathy as a "rational, albeit self-defeating defense mechanism" students use to cope with educational practices that limit the number of students who can feel good about their academic performance. While a few students are labeled "above average," the majority fall into the "average" or "below average" range.

When students rely heavily on maladaptive failure-avoiding strategies, the consequence "is a progressive deterioration of the individual's will to learn," notes Covington. "Psychologically speaking, this involves a transformation in the person from being success-oriented to becoming failure-prone and then, ultimately, failure-accepting."

## Causal Attributions

Causal attributions have to do with students' beliefs about why they perform well or poorly on school-related tasks. The causes to which students attribute their successes and failures are another piece of the complex motivation puzzle. The four most common things to which students attribute their success are ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck (Weiner 1980, cited in Raffini). Which of these is perceived to be causal makes a big difference in how students experience their successes.

Raffini contends that "when students attribute their successes to effort, they experience feelings of pride since effort is both internal and individually controllable." Similarly, if ability is viewed as the reason for their success, students will also experience a sense of pride and confidence because the cause of their success is a stable characteristic that resides within them, something that can be relied upon to help them with future challenges. On the other hand, if luck is seen as the reason for success, students will neither take credit for nor derive satisfaction from their success since luck is something over which they have no control. Students will also be robbed of a sense of pride and competence in their accomplishment if they achieve success on a task that is characterized as easy by the teacher or the student.

While success-oriented students tend to attribute their achievement to a combination of skill and effort and their failure to a lack of effort, students Covington refers to as "failure-accepting" tend to view failure as indicative of lack of ability or skill, a reflection of personal inadequacy. Unfortunately, although failure is perceived as a sign of inadequacy, success is not conversely conceptualized by these students as resulting from personal adequacy. Instead, its source is attributed to external sources, "factors such as luck, task ease or the generosity of a teacher" (Covington). Students in this category may actively shy away from success experiences because they see them as a "fluke," something they will not necessarily be able to repeat. Students who view their success as externally based are not certain they can produce more successful experiences, since their success is seen as emanating from a source outside their control.

Each experience involving students' effort and ability is a building block that lays the foundation for future learning experiences:

> Gaining confidence as a learner is a spiral in which one's effort and ability result in achievement and that achievement serves as the mental foundation for the next extension of effort and ability in learning. We do, and we believe we can do more. By not trying their best in learning, students deny themselves and their society the endowment of their gifts. (Wlodkowski and Jaynes).

## Meaning

Meaning and motivation are closely connected. As we all can attest, "whether or not persons will invest themselves in a particular activity depends on what the activity means to them" (get citation). If an individual considers an activity to be meaningful, it is more probable he will invest himself in it. People possess a "package of meanings" based on past personal experiences that they carry with them to each new situation. Our beliefs, values, and view of ourselves all play a role in determining how we respond to new situations.

As Machr points out, students make different judgments about the worth of specific tasks and "place different values on school tasks quite apart from their ability to perform." Whether competition is built into a performance situation, for example, will have an effect on how students respond to it. While the element of performance does not seem to significantly impair the performance of students who view themselves as successful and competent (for competition may be seen as another opportunity to affirm their ability), students who do not consider themselves successful will tend to perform less well on the same task if it is organized in a competitive manner than if the element of competition is absent.

## Autonomy

Like all human beings, students want to have some control over what activities they pursue and when and how they choose to engage in them. In environments where we are forced to pursue tasks and activities that are rigidly prescribed by others, our level of responsibility and commitment usually wanes. As Raffini notes, this applies to teachers as well as students: "As teachers lose autonomy, they often feel less and less responsibility about meeting curricular requirements, they

become cynical about teaching, they blame others for their cynical attitude, and they may even try to undermine the system if given an opportunity."

Although students may display their displeasure somewhat differently than teachers, a parallel pattern often emerges when they are denied a sense of self-determination. On the other hand, if students are given small choices on a regular basis, they will tend to respond positively to being able to make choices and ultimately become skilled at being self-governing (Raffini).

In addition to small choices, it is important for teachers to give students "signi.ficant and meaningful choices." By teaching students goal-setting skills and allowing them to map out some short-term learning goals for themselves, teachers can do much to foster students' sense of autonomy and self-determination (Raffini).

## Relatedness and Belonging

While the primary purpose of school is supposed to be academic, there is no getting around the fact that there is a social component to being in school. If students feel socially isolated or rejected by their peers, they will not enjoy school. Attending school will be drudgery, no matter how hard teachers try to make the material interesting and stimulating. And when students feel out of place in the classroom, their motivation to learn suffers.

Whether students find a place in the group and feel "at home" in the classroom is influenced by classroom climate. "The classroom, under the leadership of the teacher, can either provide support and approval for all of its members or it can become an arena for constant competitiveness that builds a crystallized dichotomy of acceptance and rejection," states Raffini. By emphasizing cooperation rather than competition and assisting students who are less socially skilled, teachers can promote students' motivation to learn.

## Summary

Even this cursory review reveals that a multitude of factors affect the attitudes and behaviors students bring to learning situations. Although merely being aware of variables that influence motivation is not sufficient to create change, such understanding can serve as a first step toward achieving the goal of helping students to develop or rekindle commitment to, and quality involvement in, learning.

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